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Memorial of the Society of Friends on the African Slave Trade · 1840

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MEMORIAL

OF

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

IN

PENNSYLVANIA, NEW JERSEY
AND DELAWARE,

ON

THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE.

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THE following Memorial, soliciting the interference of Congress in suppressing the African slave trade, carried on under the American flag, and by citizens of the United States, was presented to the Senate and House of Representatives, directed to be printed, and by the latter referred to the Committee on Commerce.

MEMORIAL.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled:

The Memorial of the Representatives of the Religious Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers, in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, &c.

RESPECTFULLY REPRESENTS:

That your memorialists are induced, by apprehension of religious duty, and regard for the present and future welfare of our common country, to solicit the attention of Congress to an evil of great and appalling magnitude, in which we have reasons to believe that many of our citizens are deeply involved.

We are encouraged to hope that our application will be judged worthy of serious consideration, from the circumstance that the President of the United States, at the opening of the present session, called the attention of your body to the same subject: we allude to the African slave trade. We are fully aware that this traffic is prohibited by the laws of nearly all the governments in the civilized world, whose subjects or citizens have ever been engaged in its prosecution; and that the two most active and extensive maritime nations on the globe

have denounced it as piratical, and prescribed for those who may be found employed in it the awful punishment of death; yet the information which we have obtained from various sources of unquestionable authenticity, has led to the sorrowful conviction, that this iniquitous commerce has, for several years past, been prosecuted to a greater extent, and in a manner more destructive to its victims, than it ever was before.

Under all the difficulties attendant upon this inquiry, and with ample allowance for all the questionable cases, an estimate, founded chiefly on official documents, leads to the conclusion that no fewer than one hundred and fifty thousand African slaves are annually landed on the coasts of Brazil, Cuba, and Porto Rico. A large number is known to be carried into Texas; and we have reason to apprehend that many are also introduced into the United States.

It is needless to expatiate upon the scenes of havoc and desolation from which this commerce is supplied; the sanguinary conflicts, the midnight conflagrations, and the toilsome march through inhospitable deserts, and under a burning sun, must be familiar to the mind of every person who is conversant with the history of the slave trade. From the concurrent testimony of numerous witnesses, we are warranted in the conclusion, that the number who perish by fatigue, famine, and the sword, considerably exceeds the number who reach the coast alive.

The diseases generated in the holds of the slave ships, while the traffic was tolerated, are well known to have given to the march of death more than ten times its usual speed.

But the circumstances under which it is now prosecuted have greatly increased the horrors and mortality of the middle passage. The ships engaged in it are constructed for rapid sailing; hence the space allotted to the slaves is more limited now than before the prohibitory laws were enacted. Other causes, sufficiently obvious, augment the suffering and mortality attendant upon the passage across the Atlantic. A comparison, founded upon a considerable collection of ascertained cases, appears to support the conclusion that rather more than one-fourth of the number embarked on the African coast perish before they reach the place of their destination in the western world. Connecting this conclusion with the estimate already given of those who perish in procuring the slaves actually disembarked, we are brought to the dreadful conviction that the African continent is annually despoiled, by means of the slave trade, of from four to five hundred thousand of its inhabitants; or considerably upward of a thousand a day.

If we could believe that this desolating traffic was carried on exclusively by foreigners, it might still be worthy of consideration whether the influence of the United States with the other governments of the world ought not to be exerted toward

arresting or mitigating so enormous an evil. But we have sorrowful evidence that a large part is prosecuted under the protection of the American flag, and that American citizens and American capital are deeply engaged in it. It is an undeniable fact, that numerous vessels are built in the United States and sent to Cuba and ports in the Cape de Verd islands, where a sale, real or pretended, is effected to a foreigner, and a few foreigners are taken on board—the American officers still retaining their places. With this mixed crew the vessel proceeds, under the American flag, to the African coast. If visited by a British cruiser, the American character is assumed, as an efficient protection; but in case one of our national vessels falls in their way, the foreigners figure as the crew, and the Americans take the character of passengers. The flag of the United States, being found the most efficient protection, is generally displayed until the slaves are embarked, when it disappears, and that of Spain or Portugal usually takes its place. It is even said, that the American flag has been used to cover this nefarious traffic, in its preparatory stages, in cases where neither the vessel nor crew had any claim to the American character.

If the transfer to foreigners of ships built in the United States by American citizens, equipped and prepared in all respects for the African slave trade, should even be proved to be real *bona fide* sales, still such transactions must be considered as deeply

participating in the criminality of that horrid traffic. Trading with known pirates, furnishing them with stores, or fitting out vessels for their purposes, has been regarded as a crime of equal atrocity with piracy itself.

We respectfully but earnestly solicit the serious attention of Congress to this affecting subject; and desire that they will adopt such measures as to rescue the citizens of the United States from the infamy and guilt of participating in this foul opprobrium of the Christian name. The federal government has been highly applauded for its early and active exertions for the abolition of this traffic; and we ardently desire that those who are intrusted with the legislation of this great and growing republic, may humbly seek and experience the wisdom which comes from above, to direct them in the adoption of proper measures; and that the powerful influence of the United States with other maritime nations of the world, may be judiciously exerted for the final and total suppression of a traffic so revolting to humanity, and so totally irreconcilable with the character of a Christian community.

Signed by direction, on behalf of a meeting of the Representatives aforesaid, held in Philadelphia, the 17th of the 4th month, 1840.

WILLIAM EVANS, *Clerk.*

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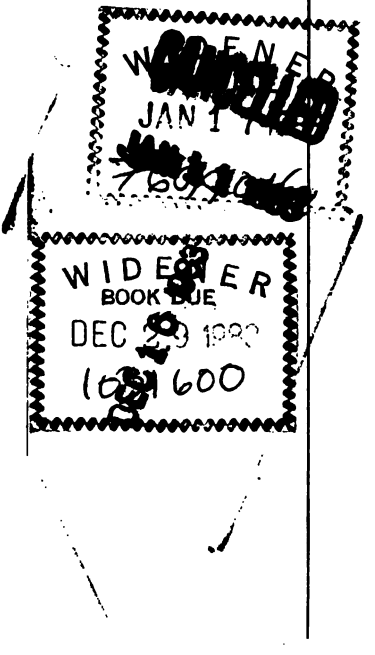

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